

**Standing Behind our Community Volunteers**  
**By Council President Scott Peters, First District**  
**For the La Jolla Light**

One of the ways San Diego empowers its citizens and gives them a voice in civic matters is through our community planning groups. These private organizations are open to residents and businesses owners in the community, and their leadership by the members, not by the City or any Councilmember. The dedicated volunteers who serve on these boards donate countless hours of their time to protect the character and feel of our neighborhoods and to provide input and advice to the City Council on an array of land use matters. They solve problems at the local level, neighbors talking with neighbors, instead of leaving them to a less-informed City Hall. I have tremendous gratitude for these hard-working men and women.

The La Jolla Community Planning Association is the planning group officially designated to advise the City on La Jolla development issues. Under the long-established City Council policy 600-24, the members receive training from the City, and are to be defended in court by the City Attorney's office if they are ever subject to legal action. Recently, an organization alleging misconduct by board members sued our planning group. I am certainly disappointed that a disagreement between two groups of community members has resulted in a lawsuit.

I am more disappointed that the city nearly abandoned its responsibility to defend these volunteers. No one should face a lawsuit without representation, as the CPA nearly did when the City Attorney denied their request to be defended by the city. I took it upon myself to bring this issue before the full City Council on June 20. After hearing from dozens of La Jolla residents, the City Attorney, to his credit, agreed that the planning association deserves a legal defense from his office. This is far preferable to having to hire a private law firm to do this work.

More importantly, the attorney representing the plaintiffs has agreed to drop his suit. The City is already helping the CPA to revise its bylaws, as his lawsuit had sought. The planning department also agreed to look into the alleged "misconduct". I know that my fellow Councilmembers share my relief that this dispute will be resolved outside of court.

It is vital that our planning groups operate in a way that is transparent and accessible to all members of the community. It is also important that those community members engage each other in a way that is civil and respectful. These kinds of disagreements do not need to end in litigation.

I myself have had disagreements with the La Jolla Community Planning Association over the years, as any involved citizen might have with any community organization. Back in the 1990's when I was a practicing lawyer and community volunteer, I recommended some procedural changes to the group with the hopes that they could more fully represent the citizens of La Jolla. They did not take my advice, but I didn't file a lawsuit. I got involved, and today I continue my involvement as a City Council member.

Whether or not we agree with the recommendations made by planning groups such as the La Jolla CPA, I hope we all appreciate the many hours of unselfish service these men and women donate to make our community a better place.